



# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **State Agency Honors Governor and Eight Others with New Award**

Richmond - In commemoration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) and Dominion Resources, Inc. co-hosted the First Annual Disability Employment Champions Awards Breakfast on October 24, 2006 at Virginia Crossings Resort in Glen Allen, Virginia. The **Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation** was honored for providing internship and employment opportunities to persons with disabilities.

The statewide event was the culmination of a series of local events held by DRS throughout the Commonwealth to honor individuals and organizations in public, private, and non-profit sectors that have helped further DRS's mission to empower individuals with disabilities to maximize their employment, independence and full inclusion into society. As the first winner of the new award, Governor Timothy M. Kaine was among nine awardees honored at the breakfast for "championing" the employment of people with disabilities.

DRS Commissioner James A. Rothrock, said of the awards breakfast, "We have inaugurated an annual event which not only recognizes policies and practices that contribute to the employment of people with disabilities, but an event which we hope will serve as a call to action to legislators, businesses, community organizations, state agencies, people with disabilities and their families. As advocates for the employment of people with disabilities, we are at the threshold of an incredible opportunity; our economy is strong, employment is up, increasing numbers of Americans are leaving the workforce, and more people with disabilities are pursuing higher education than ever before. Together we *can* help people with disabilities enter and remain in the workforce, and we *should*. It's good for business and it's good for our communities."

State agency heads, business leaders, and leaders of nonprofit and community organizations gathered at the breakfast, which, in addition to honoring Governor Kaine, recognized five businesses from around the state, a nonprofit organization, a state agency, and an individual with disabilities who is a DRS consumer. Governor Kaine was recognized for his support of the Virginia Medicaid Buy-In Program, which provides people with disabilities an opportunity and incentive to seek gainful employment by allowing them to earn higher income while ensuring continuation of needed health care coverage. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Benchmark Hospitality International at Virginia Crossings Resort, Busch Gardens Europe, the Bradford Company, and Food City are Virginia businesses which were

recognized for their demonstrated commitment through partnership with DRS to employ persons with disabilities. The Greater Richmond Association for Retarded Citizens, a local nonprofit organization, received their award for vocational programs which facilitate the employment of persons with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. The **Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation** was honored for providing internship and employment opportunities to persons with disabilities. Clayton Roth, a consumer of DRS's services, was recognized for his professional achievements.

In addition to being a venue for an awards ceremony, DRS designed the event to showcase talents and skills of persons with disabilities. Garth Larcen, the event's Master of Ceremonies, is owner of Positive Vibe Café, a local restaurant which is a project of the Get Lost MD (Muscular Dystrophy) Foundation that helps people with disabilities secure employment by providing quality basic food training. Mr. Larcen brought with him a café employee, Solomon Miles of the local band, The Goodfellas, who performed at the awards breakfast. Each table at the breakfast was adorned with a centerpiece crafted by persons with disabilities working in Goodwill of Central Virginia's plant nursery, The Green Team. Two other nonprofits, Goodwill Industries of the Valleys and Jackson River Enterprises, supplied gift baskets made by employees with disabilities.

"Our agency is but one element of a large network of partners engaged in removing barriers to employment of Virginians with disabilities," added Commissioner Rothrock, "Dominion Resources, Inc.'s co-sponsorship of this event is just one example of how public-private partnerships create opportunities for the employment of persons with disabilities. The Disability Employment Champions Awards Breakfast is a small way to acknowledge the tremendous efforts made each day by our partners who are helping to make our agency's mission a reality."

For more information about the Disability Employment Champions Awards Breakfast, please contact Kelly Wolf, Public Information Officer, Department of Rehabilitative Services, at (804) 662-7690.

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#### **About DRS**

*In partnership with people with disabilities and their families, DRS collaborates with the public and private sectors to provide and advocate for the highest quality services that empower individuals with disabilities to maximize their employment, independence and full inclusion into society. For more information about DRS, call 1-800-552-5019 (v), 1-800-464-9950 (TTY) or visit [www.vadrs.org](http://www.vadrs.org)*